

## RATIONALITY AND MORALITY IN A REIFIED SOCIETY

**Akhilesh Pathak\***

---

### **Abstract:**

Morality and Religion have been providing the ethical basis of human society for ages. But in the modern capitalist societies, labour, indubitably seems to be the inevitable driving force of human civilization. It is the only means through which produces the conditions of his existence argues Marx. Even the ancient Greek and Hellenic philosophers would agree with the argument. Thus labour has become a part of human culture which, in turn, has moved from an agricultural to an industrial way of life. The modern industrial-capitalist system opens up a new chapter in the historical analysis of the phenomenon of labour. It could be analyzed as it appears under a reified society, to use Lukacs' term. Under a reified society, labour produces commodities and transforms itself into a commodity too. In societies based on modern capitalism, every social relationship including emotions seems to acquire a commodified nature. The capitalist society is reified to a degree that even the violation of norms seems permissible if it satisfies the principle of profit under exchange relations. That renders a very special case for study, a rather circular relation between labor and commodity, the two being inseparably intertwined with particular cultural norms.

**Keywords: commodification, reification, rationality, labour, emotions**

---

\* **Research Scholar, Centre for the Study of Social Systems, JNU, New Delhi**

Rationality is a derivative of the term, 'reason'. It was reason that marked the onset of a series of revolutions in the human society, especially in Europe. Be it the scientific revolution pioneered by Sir Isaac Newton or Renaissance led by Da Vinci or Reformation championed by John Calvin and Martin Luther, there was a proclivity on the part of human society to give up its older theocentric understanding of the world in favour of a more diligently thought out picture of the world we live in. The origin of rational thought can be traced back to Rene Descartes who proclaimed, 'I think, therefore I am'. Cartesian scheme of mind-body dualism placed mind at the centre of all human endeavour. Since then, all human thought and action was to be based on sound reason. Hegel sums it up when he asserts, 'anything that is real must be reasonable'. Both empiricism as well as rationalism sought to enhance the rationality of the society. It was Kant (1781) who created a blend of the two approaches and used the term 'critique' in a positive sense in order to lay the foundation of continental Enlightenment. He defined enlightenment as: "Enlightenment is the emancipation of man from a state of self-imposed tutelage". The definition points towards a cultural pessimism wherein man was incapacitated to use his own intelligence. Individual rationality was ere-ordained by the Church and not created through the use of one's own intellect. Similar theme was discussed in Rousseau's work which led him to admit, "Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains" (Rousseau 1762). What was this chain? It was largely religion. This paper sets for itself the aim to seek an answer to the following question:

### **To what extent is rationality different from religious doctrines?**

The rationality of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and early 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe emanated to a large extent from the tenets of French Revolution. The main debate centered on the role and efficacy of religion. Thinkers such as Saint-Simon held the society to be something real beyond the existence of the individual. In his opinion, it's the job of religion to act as a cementing substance that binds the members of the society together. Thus, while the French Revolution guaranteed to establish a more rational society with advanced freedoms for individuals, religion retained its place which seemed to be a contradiction. For example, if the people would still be forced to believe: "God said light and there was light", will they pay importance to more immediate reflections of the societal rationality that encapsulates the gospel of 'liberty, equality, fraternity'? It was Max Weber who took a different view on the correspondence between rationality and religion. Weber's focus on 'occidental rationalism' led him to explain the process of rationalization that relegated the role

of religion as a whole and transformed its understanding to give rise to a newer form of protestant ethic. Weber defined rationalization as a shift from borrowed logic that one received through Church-based education towards a more 'calculated' approach in one's actions. Maximization of profits based on self-interest alone or *auri sacra fames* was outside the realm of virtues ordained by the Christian church, but it took a new flavour when ascetic 'Calvinism' advocated for a deferment of gratification based on rational calculations. Thus, while retaining the mode of social action which is capitalist enterprise based on exchange relations, a newer form of rationality took birth. Interestingly, it's religion in the form of the protestant ethic that provided a new basis for the rationalization of society.

Max Weber distinguished magic from religion. Emile Durkheim too placed the two terms into different compartments. While declaring that "religion is eminently social" (Durkheim, 1912), Durkheim acknowledged certain similarities between magic and religion, but the defining difference between the two came from the fact that religion fell in the realm of the sacred while magic was discernibly profane. Quite clearly, the distinction was based on the concept of rational and non-rational. Hence, religion though not scientific, can be rational. The empiricism of Hume, Berkeley and Locke played a major role in constructing such a form of rationality that discounted every form of knowledge that was not based on empirical reality. Thus, rationality narrowed down to only that knowledge which could be related to sense-perception and external experience. Everything that can't be verified experimentally can't be termed knowledge according to scientism of the Vienna Circle. It was Wittgenstein who refined it with his argument that every meaningful proposition must be 'logically reducible' to elementary (atomic) propositions, 'pictures of reality' in his terminology. His emphasis on the meaningfulness of logical propositions introduced the primacy of language in constructing rationality in human thought. Just as one tries to look at the processes that build rationality in the modern sense, one realizes the significance of the interactive or communicative processes aided by language.

Max Black enumerates five characteristics of rationality based on social interaction. An action-theoretic approach suggests that rationality in the modern society is constructed based on validity-claims posited by individual actors. Habermas defines rationality as: "Rationality is understood to be a disposition of speaking and acting subjects that is expressed in modes of

behaviour for which there are good reasons or grounds” (Habermas, 1984). He focuses upon the theory of argumentation through which rationality is arrived at. A particular form of argumentation gives rise to a particular form of rationality, namely, cognitive-instrumental, moral-practical, expressive and evaluative. Since argumentation involves the use of language, rationality is also constructed linguistically.

Fact-value dichotomy expounded by Herbert Simon plays an important role in deciding upon the best approach, rather the most rational approach to a problem. From a decision-theoretic perspective, problems are first bifurcated into facts and values and it is only the former that is of relevance in Simon's scheme of things (Simon, 1945). His concept of bounded rationality is one way of proving the inability of the human mind to grasp everything about a given problem. It is similar to the problem of the 'unknown' explained by Spencer and Kant's 'things in themselves'. Thus, once agreed that all can't be understood, rationality has acquired a 'makes sense' perspective. If it is intelligible to the actors involved in a particular 'definition of the situation' (W.I. Thomas), and everybody agrees to it through a communicative process, it makes sense to the group and the axis of rationality assumes a new form called 'communicative rationality'. Looked at from the framework of communicative rationality, an important question to be asked is:

### **What has happened to the concept of morality with increasing rationalization of society?**

Morality until Enlightenment was ordained from theological doctrines that saw nature as order created by God. St. Augustine argued that God is good, rather good is God keeping in line with philosophy of his days which had three branches – the moral, the logical and the physical, God being the principle of all three. The authority of the Church would not encourage its adherents to make sense of the world based upon any other idea but religious doctrines. Augustinian thought justified everything as God's creation and since God is infallible, all that he creates must be good. He remarked, “Whatever is is right”. He summed it up with the dictum, “De Libero Arbitrio” which can be translated as 'nature is good'. However, the growth of humanity based on science propelled it towards enlightenment which questioned morality based on theological doctrines. Immanuel Kant states the fact quite categorically through his argument: “every man creates his God. From the moral point of view...you even have to create your God, in order to

worship in Him your creator. For in whatever way...the Deity should be made known to you, and even...if He should reveal Himself to you: it is you...who must judge whether you are permitted [by your conscience] to believe in Him, and to worship Him” (as quoted in Popper, 1963). Although religion retained its place among the psyche of the common people, it lost its centrality. People began to question the very foundations that distinguished between right and wrong, good and bad. Kant declared that religion can only be understood within the limit of reason. Thus, reason was exalted to a level never before. Skepticism overcame dogmatism of the past and morality became more social than religious. It became the basis of collective conscience of the society according to Durkheim. Marquis de Sade in his seminal work, *Histoire de Juliette* (1797) presents a vivid account of the loss of sanctity once held by morality. Juliette, the central character questioned everything and made a mockery of almost every Christian teaching. There was an emphasis on evil practices such as murder and robbery as it gave an antithesis to the previous notion of piety attached with all warranted human actions (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947). Religion through the process of Reformation acquired a form that was more this-worldly and anthropocentric instead of being other-worldly and theo-centric. Max Weber attributes it to the process of rationalization that rendered social action more 'calculable'. A very true representation of the term, rational! In the strict Parmenidean and Pythagorean understanding, anything that can be reduced to a set of relational numbers can be said to be rational. Hence, exchange relations became more calculated with a tendency towards multiplying both profit and savings. For the first time, frugality became a virtue and deferment of gratification played a key role in establishing the modern capitalist system. All this was a consequence of the Copernican revolution that accorded scientific inquiry an elevated seat in the house. Knowledge based on experience and verified through experiments became the only epitome of truth, if there was any. Thus, came to life the most heralded form of rationality, the 'occidental rationalism'.

Scientific rationality seems to be the most perfect and the most advanced tool of making sense of the world around. Most of the imperialist ventures were undertaken based upon this rationality. *Mision Civilisatrice* is what the French would call it (Ferguson, 2008). It's a mission they set out for themselves in order to civilize the uncivilized. Eugene Fischer gave it a new turn when he devised techniques of improving the quality of human race through controlled breeding. This understanding of the world stood revised with ethnographic works that presented a different side

of the picture altogether. Works of Frazer and Tylor illuminated the point that the tribal societies had their own way of interpretations which could not be discarded as inferior to scientific rationality of the Europeans. Levi-Strauss has a similar understanding while trying to unravel the secrets among these people through his structural study of myth. More recently, Jurgen Habermas grappled with the idea of rationality and tried to find a solution to the mythical-modern debate. He admits, “In archaic societies myths fulfil the unifying function of worldviews in an exemplary way – they permeate life-practice” (Habermas, 1984). He goes on to categorically state that “Mythical worldviews are far from making possible rational orientations of action in our sense” (Habermas, 1984). Hence, in the first instance it seems as if mythical ways of life do not lie within the ambit of rationality. But Habermas refers to works of Levy-Bruhl and especially Evans-Pritchard's study of the Azande tribe in Africa. In his own words, “The well-known investigations of Evans-Pritchard concerning the belief in witchcraft among the African Azande confirmed the view that the differences between mythical and modern thought do not lie at the level of logical operations” (Habermas, 1984). He further contends that “Our point of departure has to be that adult members of primitive tribal societies can acquire basically the same formal operations as the members of modern societies, even though the higher-level competences appear less frequently and more selectively in them; that is, they are applied in more restricted spheres of life. The rationality of worldviews is not measured in terms of logical and semantic properties but in terms of the formal-pragmatic basic concepts they place at the disposal of individuals for interpreting their world” (Habermas, 1984). In order to make sense of the world, tribal societies take help of myths which have a totalizing effect on their understanding of the nature and its various forces. An analogy of the natural phenomenon is interwoven with moral precepts in the form of myths that are derived mostly from the kinship systems and people's own experience. Thus, from the standpoint of giving meaning to human existence, mythico-religious rationality is no less effective than the modern form of rationality. The only point of difference could be the fact that mythical world does not support a clear cut differentiation of the objective, social and subjective worlds, the central theme in Habermasian analysis. It also lacks reflexivity and is not open to criticism and revision. It is based upon these reasons that modern form of rationality that is based on communicative processes provides an alternative understanding of the problem of rationality and the extent of its departure from religious thought.

Rationality in modern societies does not represent a structure; rather it is a process, a process of reaching understanding through argumentation. Max Black lists a series of conditions that decide upon the rationality of an action:

1. Only actions under actual or potential control by the agent are suitable for dianoetic appraisal.
2. Only actions directed toward some end-in-view can be reasonable or unreasonable.
3. Dianoetic appraisal is relative to the agent and to his choice of end-in-view.
4. Judgements of reasonableness are appropriate only where there is partial knowledge about the availability and efficacy of the means.
5. Dianoetic appraisal can always be supported by reasons.<sup>1</sup>

All three forms of rationality – cognitive-instrumental, moral-practical and aesthetic-practical are in fact a rough translation of the Aristotelian categories of logic, rhetoric and dialectic. There is no truth that claims to be valid under all conditions and for one and all. It's only through the process of reaching an understanding that a truth is created and accepted by the parties to the communicative process. This is something Habermas calls communicative rationality, a rationality that is not simply a scientifically-oriented judgement based on calculations. He emphasizes the utility of the tool of argumentation that generates the element of truth out of given communicative process among a group of members sharing the same lifeworld (lebenswelt). Thus, it's not the introduction of scientific thought that eliminates the traditional mythical and religious ways of understanding the world, rather it's the composition of the lifeworld that carries with itself a particular background knowledge which may also include elements emanating out of religious doctrines, especially in the case of moral-practical rationality. But it is never accepted as a dogmatic principle, rather it is through a communicative process of reaching understanding that all forms of rationality are formed and maintained. That brings to the fore an interesting argument put forth by Steven Lukes who talked about the acceptance of alternative forms of rationality. An acceptance of the fact on the part of one trained in a modern society based on the occidental model that there are multiple approaches to the problem of rationality assumes centrality in Lukes's argument. The synonymous nature of logical and scientific stands challenged. For an argument to be scientific, all its premises well as inferences must be valid whereas a notion can be counted as logical if the inferences are true

---

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed discussion of this view on rationality, see *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Volume 1), p. 12.

provided the premises are true, the individual validity of the premises being irrelevant. Evans-Pritchard sums it up succinctly as “A pot is broken during firing. This is probably due to grit. Let us examine the pot and see if this is the cause. That is logical and scientific thought. Sickness is due to witchcraft. Let us consult the oracles to discover who the witch responsible is. That is logical and unscientific thought”. The category of logical and unscientific introduces a newer form of rationality which acquires the 'makes sense' perspective. If there is an agreement over the truth-validity of a particular piece of thought, it goes down as rational. Taking the Lukacsian view, one would argue that a reified society is subsumed within the commodified ways of living to an extent that it automatically accepts certain patterns of interactions as rational. Consequently, in practice, there are not too many variations to be observed in the manner in which communicative rationality operates. It is here that ethics seem to be guided by traditional forms of interpreting the world, sometimes through categories such as religion. Thus, the growth of argumentation and communicative rationality has broken the relevance of religion as a structured way of interpretation; rather both nature and culture need to be interpreted through a processual understanding based on communicative rationality. The triumph of communicative rationality tends to enhance the role of external conditions and increased human interaction in playing a decisive role in shaping the conditions of living in modern societies.

### **The case of a Reified Society**

The 'external determination of knowledge' as Karl Mannheim<sup>2</sup> would call it gets best reflected in the phenomenon of commodification that Marx describes as, "A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labour appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labour" (as quoted in Lukacs 1923). This commodity fetishism leads the society to a peculiar form of rationality wherein every walk of human life acquires a form that is characterized by 'instrumental rationality' based on the principle of input-output ratio. It's something that Lukacs would term 'reification'. Hence, in societies based on modern capitalism, every social relationship including emotions seems to acquire a commodified nature. Georg Lukacs being from the Frankfurt School of critical theory could not fall in line with either of the two dominant themes attempting to explain the various

---

2 Mannheim developed the field of Sociology of knowledge and expounded the idea of external or social determination of knowledge in detail in his book, *Ideology and Utopia* published in 1936.

ramifications underlying the linkages between economy and society - Marxian and Weberian. Instead he sought to forge a synthesis between the two. He took the basic dialectical model of society from Marx wherein the society is commodified to an extent that there is seldom a thought to be found that does not apply the market rationality that has become ubiquitous. The Weberian approach of interpretive Sociology that Weber derived from Dilthey influenced Lukacs to focus on 'subjective experience' of the individuals when it comes to making sense of the society as an arrangement of social relationships. These social relationships are determined on the pattern of the relationships developed under market conditions.

The tendency of the market to have an overarching impact on human psyche has been expounded by another Frankfurt School theorist, Theodore Adorno in his critique of culture. Adorno (1991) talks about the 'objectification of culture' which he thinks is a condition wherein the culture itself becomes an object represented through material symbols and artifacts that are nothing but objects with exchange-values. He points out the contradiction in the categories called 'culture' and 'objectification'. In his estimate, culture is the 'suspension of objectification'. Interestingly, the culture industry and the application of instrumental rationality have produced a situation that results in the 'objectification of culture' itself. He criticizes the process of moulding the ears of the audience for a particular kind of programme that the radio in the USA of the early and mid-twentieth century aired. The cause, according to Adorno, is the fact that the government under the influence of the concept of modernity tried to promote a 'mass culture' that bred individuals of similar tastes and dispositions. Modernity<sup>3</sup> that had its origin in the European Enlightenment seems to have ruled the roost for another century and a half right until the Second World War that instilled a kind of skepticism in the minds of the academics as well as the common men and women against the tall claims of modernity in enhancing the happiness of the people. Francis Bacon considered it to be the duty of science to become an agent for increasing the happiness of people.<sup>4</sup> Kant, on the other hand, affirmed: "To be happy is necessarily the wish of every finite rational being, and this, therefore, is inevitably a determining principle of its faculty of desire." (Kant, 1787).

---

3 Talcott Parsons considers three main waves that determined the onslaught of the phenomenon of European modernity – technology, educational revolution and democratic revolution.

4 J. B. Bury puts forth this idea by Francis Bacon in his book, *The Idea of Progress* published in 1920.

In the context of mutual relationships, social relationships are expected to increase happiness rather than decreasing it. To every relationship, there is an angle of a transmitter-receiver relation. The transmitter seeks a response from the receiver, favourable of course. That makes it an exchange relation based on market-based instrumental rationality. 'Give and take' relationships have actually commercialized and commodified emotions. Arlie Hochschild makes an apt remark in her book, *The Managed Heart*, "When worked-up warmth becomes an instrument of service work, what can a person learn about herself from her feelings? And when a worker abandons her work smile, what kind of tie remains between her smile and herself?" (Hochschild, 1983). She talks about the principle of 'emotive dissonance' similar to 'cognitive' dissonance<sup>5</sup>. She draws on examples from the airlines industry. Two narratives, one from a flight attendant and the other from an airline passenger have been cited by her in order to bring out the truth of the argument. The flight attendant employed by Delta Airlines said: "If they could have turned every one of us into sweet quiet Southern belles with velvet voices like Rosalyn Carter, this is what they would want to stamp out on an assembly line." (Hochschild, 1983). The airline passenger has his own opinion about the way the flight attendants behave with passengers on board. He says: "When you see them receiving passengers with that big smile, I don't think it means anything. They have to do that. It's part of their job. But now if you get into a conversation with a flight attendant. . . well. . . no . . . I guess they have to do that too." (Hochschild, 1983).

The objectivism-subjectivism antinomy<sup>6</sup> has been one of the central concerns of philosophers and sociologists since the days of Enlightenment. Wittgensteinian notion of rule skepticism that seems to connect the rule and action to a degree that renders human actions as natural as it gets. Human actions and the rules that guide them are considered as one whole inseparable in form and content. This stands as a revision of the Kantian epistemological stand which suggests that there are objective facts and subjective feelings that have no overlap whatsoever, the problem being in the modes of perception through the cognitive abilities of the individuals that capture these objective facts. Kant was of the opinion that it is through their subjective feelings that

---

5 'Cognitive dissonance' is the theory propounded by Leon Festinger in 1957 which is a condition of mental stress when there are contradicting ideas and beliefs.

6 Antinomies were explained by Immanuel Kant in order to prove the limitations to knowledge with the common ways of perception and understanding the world of phenomenon in which we live.

people make sense of the 'objective reality'. Thus, human behaviour, though capable of being studied objectively can never be fully understood owing to the inability of the methods in social sciences to fully understand subjective feelings and emotions. What seemed to be a problem area in epistemology, has been resolved with the process of reification where objective and subjective merge with the subjective rendering itself amenable to valuation in terms of market-based rationality. Human emotions are also traded as commodities.

Personal service has become a vibrant industry since the 1970s. The days of the 'barbershop quartet' have been replaced by massage service which has attained a scale of popularity that creates some of the most-visited tourist destinations around the world, especially the regions in the equatorial Asia near Thailand and the Malay Peninsula. Economy driven by personal service has been highlighted by Paul Halmos (1970) in his book, *Personal Service Society*. He explains the effect of the concept of personal service on the skills needed in order to secure a job in the market.

The history of nuanced behaviour and refined mannerisms characteristic of the world of commodified emotions could be traced back to the medieval Europe and the impact of Renaissance as explained by Norbert Elias in his book, *The Civilizing Process*<sup>7</sup>. Norbert Elias traced the history of manners and the causes of the genesis of the set of etiquette that the medieval Europe has known since Renaissance. He focused on the structural changes in the state-formation with an emphasis on the realm of the cultural. He, without rejecting Marxism completely, differed from the Marxist idea of 'economic determinism'. To him, it was the patterns of social interactions that determined the culture rather than economic considerations. He accepts the impact on the change in human ways of interactions in the sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe on account of the rise of capitalism with imperialism as one of its offshoots. There was a need to pacify one's own territory and keep one's own domestic population satisfied. This tendency on the part of the rulers led people to recognize a new sense of personal security and violence of all kinds in the domestic sphere came to be regarded as something utterly despicable. Gone were the days when warrior qualities were one of the most revered ones and the warriors

---

7 Norbert Elias traced the history of civilization published in the first volume of *The Civilizing Process* entitled, "History of Manners".

had personal weapons to protect themselves. A horde of virtues encircled one's actions in public. St. Augustine coined the famous dictum, “God is good” which more often than not stands to be read as “good is God”. Whatever is good is virtuous and violence certainly fell out of the sphere of the good. Thus, pleasurable killing was discouraged and public display of cruelty became a deplorable act. Public dueling was no longer seen as either an act of valour or a matter of comic relief. The resulting sanction against violence could be considered as the origin of warmth in mannerisms and personal encounters quite easily discerned in the feigned emotions expounded by Arlie Hochschild.

'Attunement' became one of the central themes in Elias's work. It arose as a reaction to the fact that men with varying inclinations and interests had to interact with each other and were forced to maintain an amicable relationship among them. Coexistence led to the refinement of behaviour in a number of ways. The art of inhibited behaviour attained significance. As Franz Boas<sup>8</sup> (1901) would argue, the capacity of humans when it comes to abstraction, inhibition and choice are similar in all human beings, no matter whether they belong to primitive societies or the advanced societies of today. That is an argument that considers the 'nature' part of a human personality. The 'nurture' part is something we learn. Boas' argument can be studied in the light of the inhibited behaviour one learnt in the medieval Europe. Living together established a set of norms to be followed in all human interactions. The role of attunement could be seen as setting up a society based on a social division of labour with everyone accepting their respective roles in the society. In Elias's words, it was prescribed that “people must attune their conduct to that of others, and the web of action must be organized more and more strictly and accurately, if each individual action is to fulfill its social function” (Elias, 1978).

The rules encircling each and every human activity can be seen as a symbol of 'repressive desublimation'<sup>9</sup>, a term introduced by Herbert Marcuse which describes the helplessness and the inability of an individual to think beyond what is normal and common sensical. He calls it the phenomenon of one-dimensionality which in the modern sense depicts a condition wherein the individual finds it difficult to think 'out of the box'. A similar argument could be seen in

---

8 Franz Boas explains the theory in his article entitled, 'The Mind of Primitive Man' published in 1901.

9 Repressive desublimation is the term explained by Herbert Marcuse in his 1964 book, *One-Dimensional Man*. It's a critique of the higher culture which derived its elements from Freud's psychoanalysis.

Theodore Roszak's work wherein he portrays a picture of the left parties in Europe who despite critiquing the state, went against the student demonstrations in Moscow which actually went against their way of engaging with politics. The structure of society had coloured the minds of the people to an extent that even the critique from the left parties had a mild overtone. More or less, they complied with the deeply entrenched and widely accepted norms of the society. The newer generation that led the countercultural movement in the 1960s and 1970s termed this attitude of the leftist leaders as 'daddy's politics'<sup>10</sup> which they thought was toothless and had lost all vigour that left ideology asked for. The youth wanted them to be more aggressive and demanding when it came to taking the battle against the state. Roszak makes an interesting statement about the societal norms regarding sexual freedom advocated by the so-called progressive forces of the advanced capitalist nations of Western Europe. He says that although it's meant to be emancipatory for one and all, it is actually professed only in connection with the rich and the upper classes capable of leading a life of affluence. Ramchandra Guha<sup>11</sup> calls it an affluent society that believes in nothing but maximization of profit.

The tendency to be materialistic and a belief in the idea of progress have its epistemological roots in the belief on a world 'out there'. Melvin Pollner calls it 'Mundane Reason' in his book that goes with the same title. He argues that we generally never take a different view on what is reality. He cites how a researcher from another planet visits our earth and takes the scientific view to be infallible when it came to establishing truth. This is the most common mistake that the advocates of the idea of social progress aided by science and technology commit. The Vienna Circle philosophers tried to construct a view of rationality that tried to club Weber's views on rationality into one big whole which has now been called 'cognitive-instrumental' rationality by Jurgen Habermas (Habermas, 1984). The influence of Saussurian linguistics and the Wittgensteinians have elevated the place of language to the level of the most fundamental determinant of rationality. Every aspect of human activity as well as thought seems to be controlled by structural patterns embedded in the very syntax of language. Rudolf Carnap in his book, *The Logical Syntax of Language* argued that at the syntactical level every language could

---

10 Theodore Roszak criticized the technocratic nature of the American society that was found wanting when it came to fulfilling the aspirations of the American youth.

11 Guha explains the phenomenon of the affluent society in his environmental history of human civilization in his book, *Social Ecology* published in 1994.

be understood in terms of axioms and theorems similar to mathematics. This view of understanding language has a logical positivist bias that fails at the level of semantics. Not just with language, rather it's the case with every aspect of science that loses its claims of exactness at vital points. Thus, Paul Feyerabend's thesis presents a critique of the completeness of any approach to knowledge, both qualitative as well as quantitative because both have their own limitations. Hence, he took the position of 'methodological anarchism'<sup>12</sup> that leaves it to the researcher to select the appropriate method while conducting a research. Feyerabend's viewpoint has been echoed in the works of quite a large number of post-structuralists such as Foucault and Bourdieu, but the problem seldom presents itself for a solution. Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus'<sup>13</sup> explains how one's own patterned way of living and thinking creates a structure that subsumes every aspect of one's life, outside which almost it is impossible for one to think.

Walter Benjamin<sup>14</sup> explained the commonly observed nexus between economics and art. He picked the cue from Marx (1859) who in his Critique of Political Economy, adopted labour as his central concern which, he argued, was determined by 'capital'. His scheme of thoughts distinguished between the 'use-value' and the 'exchange-value' of articles of production in the capitalist mode of production. While use-value is the real form of 'utility' of an object, it's in the exchange-value that one finds the operating side of economy. The triumph of scientific thought in Europe set in a process of technological revolution that set on roll the most revolutionizing invention of Europe in the form of James Watt's Steam engine. A series of inventions followed it that gave rise to a new mode of production and altered the entire meaning of production that was mostly about subsistence to an industry that began to produce goods for profit. It wasn't just about the change in the nature and scale of reproduction, rather the whole idea of labour underwent a change in the wake of the revolution. Marx bifurcates labour into two based on his analysis of the capitalist mode of production. He sees in it a 'concrete' labour that is more discernible and direct with its own exchange value and an 'abstract' labour of which a sense could only be made at the philosophical level. On tracing the history of every manufactured

---

12 Feyerabend introduced the term, 'methodological anarchism' in his book, *Against Method* published 1975.

13 *Habitus* was used in the German academic circles in the early twentieth century. Marcel Mauss used it in French. Elias used it only when writing in German. His English editions replace it with the term, 'personality makeup'.

14 Walter Benjamin came up with a critique of our fine arts inspired by Paul Valery's comments on the subject published as an essay entitled, 'The work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Production' in his book, *Illuminations* published in 1968.

article, one can easily find that every form of matter used in the manufacturing process is itself a manifestation of labour in some other form which is 'congealed' in the very nature of the commodity.

Walter Benjamin talks about the role of such production in reproducing the work of art. Paul Valery talked about the influence of technology on fine arts. In his words, "For the last twenty years neither matter nor space nor time has been what it was from time immemorial. We must expect great innovations to transform the entire technique of the arts, thereby affecting artistic invention itself and perhaps even bringing about an amazing change in our very notion of art." (as quoted in Benjamin, 1968)<sup>15</sup>. Benjamin builds around Valery's observation and comes up with the thesis of the mechanical production of art. In the earlier days of painting, every painter used to produce works of art with a sense of uniqueness in every unit of painting. Similarly, the professional artists in the form of actors and singers who performed live on stage had some sort of uniqueness to their performance as it could not be copied and reproduced completely. But, with the invention of other techniques of art such photography, a different picture of reality could be produced and reproduced with the use of technology which does not represent the creativity of the photographer to the extent it used to be the case with the painter. More so with the technique of copying the same picture, even the claim to originality by the photographer gets lost. The performance of the actor on stage might convey a similar theme, but the same captured through camera and transmitted in the form of a reel which could be reproduced infinite times, injects a sense of ordinariness to the performance. The ability to produce cassettes and DVDs actually made stars in the era of the counterculture movement in 1960s and 1970s. While going against the mainstream culture has always produced popular stars such as Francois Rabelais in medieval Europe, the question to be asked is: Had there not been proper technology as aid, could stars such as John Lennon and Kurt Cobain have ever been produced? Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter (2005) in their book, *The Rebel Sell* have constructed a thesis which sounds as a critique of the counterculture movement. The goals it set for itself actually sought to fight against capitalism and its tools of exploitation. Quite contrary to the goal, it ended up producing stars that became fashion symbols giving rise to a new wave of consumerism, especially among the youth. Hence, it could be inarguably said that art as a symbol of protest was subsumed within the

---

15 Originally published in a paper entitled 'The Conquest of Ubiquity' published in 1928.

prevalent norms of instrumental rationality. Walter Benjamin explained the phenomenon in the following words: “The greater the decrease in the social significance of an art form, the sharper the distinction between criticism and enjoyment by the public. The conventional is uncritically enjoyed, and the truly new is criticized with aversion.”<sup>16</sup> (Benjamin, 1968).

An interesting case pops up in the 'economics of prohibition'. While prohibition is the way in which a society attempts to maintain the wider norms and tries to compel all its members in following the mores of the society. Mark Thornton in his study entitled, *Economics of Prohibition*<sup>17</sup> quite lucidly explains how it's the act of prohibition that opens up opportunity of some kinds of trade. Thus, the capitalist society is reified to a degree that even the violation of norms seems permissible if it satisfies the principle of profit under exchange relations. To conclude, it could be said that the phenomenon of reification is one big cosmic whole beyond which one finds it hard to escape in the society we live in.

### **References:**

- Adorno, Theodore. 1991. *The Culture Industry*. Routledge Classics. New York.
- Behrent, Michael C. 2008. 'The Mystical Body of Society: Religion and Association in Nineteenth-Century French Political Thought'. *Journal of the History of Ideas* 69 (2): 219-243.
- Benjamin, Walter. 1968. *Illuminations*. Schocken Books. New York.
- Boas, Franz. 1901. 'The Mind of Primitive Man'. *Science, New Series* 13 (321): 281-289.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1990 (1980). *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford University Press. Stanford.
- Bury, J. B. 1920. *The Idea of Progress*. Temple of Earth Publishing. London.
- Carnap, Rudolf. 2000 (1937). *Logical Syntax of Language*. Routledge. London.
- De Saussure, Ferdinand. 1915. *A Course in General Linguistics*. McGraw-Hill Book Company. London.
- Durkheim, Emile, 1938 (1895). *The Rules of Sociological Method*. The Free Press. New

---

<sup>16</sup> Extracted from his essay, 'The work of art in the age of mechanical production' published in his book entitled *Illuminations* in 1968.

<sup>17</sup> It's a study conducted on the American society but comes quite handy in analyzing other societies of our times.

- York. Durkheim, Emile, 1964 (1912). *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Translated by Joseph Ward Swain. George Allen & Unwin Ltd. London.
- Elias, Norbert. 2000. *The Civilizing Process*. Translated by Edmund Jephcott. Blackwell Publishers. New Jersey.
  - Feyerabend, Paul. 1993. *Against Method*. Verso Books. London.
  - Guha, Ramchandra, 1994. *Social Ecology*. Oxford University Press. Delhi.
  - Habermas, Jurgen. 1984. *The Theory of Communicative Action*. Volume 1. Translated by Thomas McCarthy. Beacon Press. Boston.
  - Habermas, Jurgen. 1984. *The Theory of Communicative Action*. Volume 2. Translated by Thomas McCarthy. Beacon Press. Boston.
  - Halmos, Paul. 1970. *Personal Service Society*. Constable Publishers. London.
  - Heath, Joseph and Potter, Andrew. 2005. *The Rebel Sell*. Capstone Publishing Limited. West Sussex.
  - Hochschild, Arlie. 1983. *The Managed Heart*. University of California Press. London.
  - Horkheimer, Max and Adorno, Theodor W. 2002. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Edited by Gunzelin Schmid Noerr. Translated by Edmund Jephcott. Stanford University Press. Stanford, California.
  - Kant, Immanuel. 2010 (1787). *Critique of Practical Reason*. Penn State Classics. Pennsylvania.
  - Kant, Immanuel. 2010 (1781). *The Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated by J.M.D. Meiklejohn. Electronic Classics Series. Pennsylvania State University. Pennsylvania.
  - Mannheim, Karl. 1924. *Ideology and Utopia*. Translated by Louis Wirth and Edward Shils. Harvest Books. San Diego.
  - Marcuse, Herbert. 1964. *One-Dimensional Man*. Beacon Publishers. New York.
  - Pollner, Melvin. 1987. *Mundane Reason*. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge.
  - Popper, Karl. 2002 (1959). *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*. Routledge Classics. London. Popper, Karl. 2002 (1963). *Conjectures and Refutations*. Routledge Classics. London.
  - Roszak, Theodore. 1969. *The Making of a Counter Culture*. Doubleday & Company, Inc. New York.

- Rousseau, Jean Jacques. 1984 (1762). *A Discourse on Inequality*. Penguin Classics. New York. Simon, Herbert. 1997 (1947). *Administrative Behaviour*. Fourth edition. The Free Press. New York.
- Thornton, Mark. 2014 (1991). *The Economics of Prohibition*. Mises Institute. Auburn.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 2001 (1921). *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Routledge Classics. London.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 2009 (1958). *Philosophical Investigations*. Blackwell Publishing Ltd. West Sussex.